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Student teacher Deanna Vitola writes on the smart board in a music class at Washington Oak Elementary School in Coventry

Technology wows students at Washington Oak Elementary

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COVENTRY—It's magic! whisper kindergarten students in Scarlett St. Martin's Washington Oak Elementary School music class as student teacher Deanna Vitola writes musical notes on the smart board.

Unlike a traditional whiteboard, the smart board is essentially a touch-sensitive computer screen

and as Vitola sweeps colored markers across it shapes appear. Beyond typical drawing or writing, the board allows teachers to do any other applications they would do on a computer, on a large scale in front of the class.

In St. Martin's music class, the students got to use the smart board as well. They were eager to get up in front of class and draw musical notes on the board to compose their own musical

piece.

This was the first time that the kindergartners got to use the smart board, St. Martin said, and the class was developed by Vitola, who is studying education at Providence College.

Thanks to multiple grants and donations there is a lot of technology in the building, says Principal Dr. Donna Raptakis.

In every pod in the building teachers are using tablets and

projectors to impose their notes onto the board, teaching through video, sound, and computer, Raptakis said. The faculty is creating web resources and continually exposing students to new kinds of technology.

Technology is a motivational tool in elementary education, Raptakis says. "It's preparing kids to function in a global society."

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With a program called “iClick” Washington Oak is also using some technology that is still in pilot stages. The bar-shaped remote controls have A, B, C, D, and E keys on them and allow teachers to quickly prepare and execute a quiz. Students click the answers in and the ratio of answers is projected on a screen, Raptakis said. While the students don’t know who answered which question, the teacher can go back and print off students’ specific results.

Reading specialists use the computer lab with an internet-based program called “RAD KIDS” that reads to students and practices voice-recognition, Raptakis said. It gives special needs students individualized feedback, says teacher Andrea Braga. “It’s an alternative to a traditional book. The students can use the program in a traditional setting, take a quiz when they’re done, and [that reading] counts towards their 25 books.”

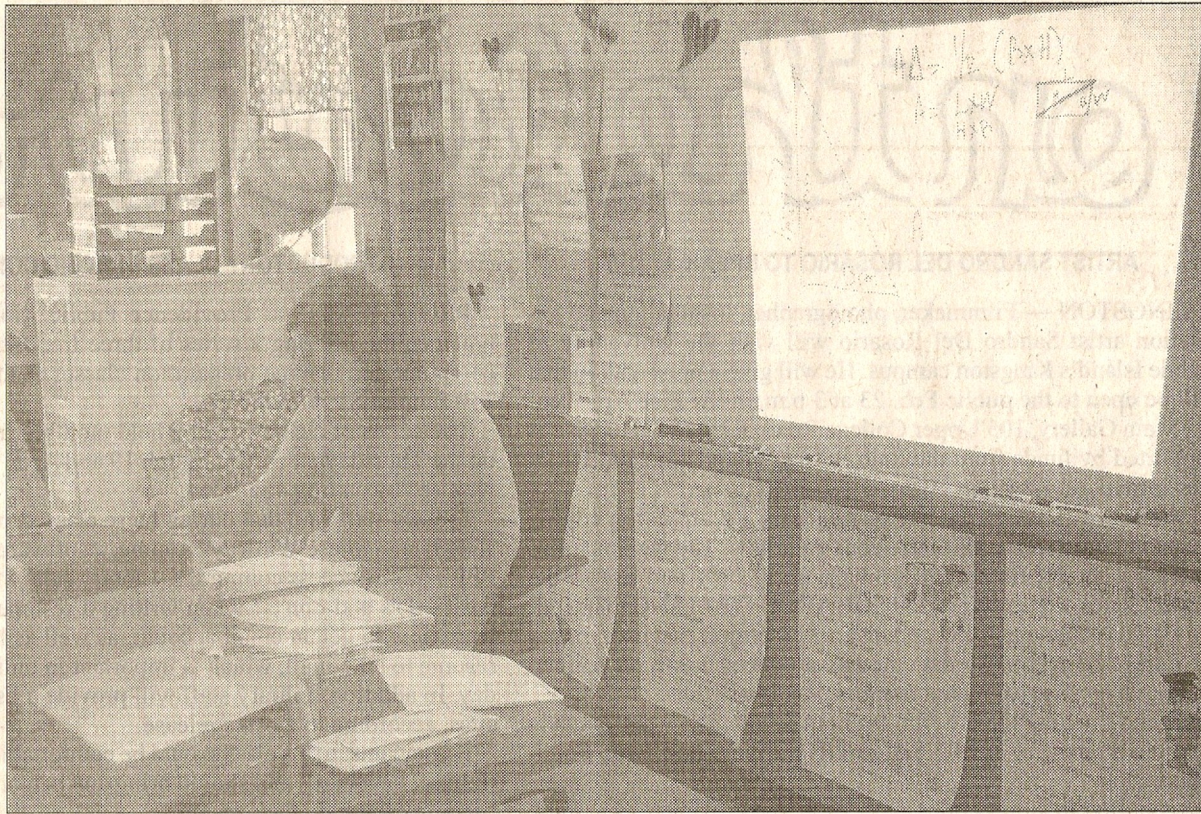
Most recently, twenty computers were donated by General Dynamics Electric

Boat to the school. These will be set up in the library. Having more computers close at hand will be helpful says Librarian Lynn McDonald. “Third, fourth, and fifth grade students research and present power points,” she said. “During their library time kids don’t just check books out, we hake them to the lab to do a web quest.” Having the computers in the library will maximize what she is able to do.

As a resource for other teachers, Washington Oak teachers are creating “Wiki” curriculum, says Reading Specialist Erin Wright. A Wiki is any kind of webpage that anyone online can edit—the best-known one is Wikipedia.

Her Wiki, Wright said, is a reading skills page that is organized like a guide for teachers outlining five basic assessment areas and her guide to teaching them.

Using technology in the classroom at Washington Oak “adds a while new dimension to the learning process,” Wright said. “Moving beyond textbooks and into new resources is what we need to do to get them ready for the rest of their lives.”



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Washington Oak Elementary School teacher Jackie Costa uses a template and a projector in her classroom.